M. Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1928-1929) 1934
Bush Negroes
Saramacca

Chapter I

DEATH AT GANKWE

WE HAD not thought to come upon death on our first night in the Suriname bush. What had killed Sedefo's brother no one could as yet say, for the time had not come to call upon the spirit of the dead man to speak. Death, said the Bush Negroes, was ravaging the family. Kunu, the law of retribution, the tool of ancestors and gods, had found this latest victim an easy prey to the black magic which had been invoked against him. In whispers they talked about a quarrel at work with a man who had a powerful snake god.

"The man's family kunu and the enemy's Aboma god," we heard as a refrain to the low muttering.

There would be dancing all that night for the spirit of the dead, the natives told us, and they asked if we did not wish to come and honor the dead. But an old man objected. "Let them wait until tomorrow," he said, "let them wait until they are rested. To face the spirit of the dead their own spirits must be strong."

That night whenever we stirred in our sleep we strained for the sound of the drums, but the wind blew from the east, and though Gankwe, where the dead man lay in state, was but a ten-minute run down the rapids, we could hear nothing. In the morning, however, we heard them plainly, heard the invocations drummed by the grave diggers on their way to the burial ground deep in the bush on the opposite bank.

Osio tintin
Osio he'e dyo.

[P. 2 contain no textual material]

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REBEL DESTINY

"On the sacred apinti drum we speak to the spirit; we tell it we go to dig the grave." So the drum spoke. From the shore we could see five figures in the small corial, and, as they came closer, we saw also the drum, the food the men carried, and the muddy hoe. They would do this the next day and the next, for to dig a grave takes a long time.

I

Although separated by many generations from their African places of origin, the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana have held to the traditions and beliefs of their aboriginal home. In the Surinaame bush, as in Africa, the responsibility which an individual bears toward his social group does not end with death. His clan, his village, and his family look to him, when he has joined the spirits of his ancestors, to protect them against the magic of their enemies, to help them in time of drought or pestilence, and at all times to intercede for them with the gods.

As in Africa, the spirit of the dead is powerful for good or evil, and the rites of death must be carried out as tradition demands, so that the dead man may feel he has received honor among the living and proper introduction to the world of the dead. As in Africa, we found that the first care for the dead is to place the body on the central portion of a broken canoe; that rum and tobacco are included in the water with which the body is washed; that in washing the dead, the back must not be touched; that the number of those who wash the body must not be an even one—five is the number preferred, though three persons are used, and seven; that those chosen must not be young, for it takes age and the knowledge of controlling the spirits which age brings to approach the dead without suffering harm.

While the body lies in the open house of the dead, relatives and the village elders are in attendance on the spirit night and day. It is they who all night tell stories about the trickster, spider Ananzi, to amuse the spirit, and they who play traditional games. The dances begin when

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of him from whom it had dropped. The same belief in the identification of the essence of one's being with any part of one's body which actuates so many primitive peoples, and is so characteristic of West Africa, exists among the Bush Negroes. It is for this reason that when an African or a Bush Negro dies away from home some of his hair and nail parings are sent to his native village for ceremonial burial. And it is for this reason, too, that for three mornings we saw the party of five young men go out from Gankwe to dig the grave of Sedefo's brother and heard the drum's invocation,

Osio tintin
Osio be'e dyo.

2

The night was still and dark. The natives said the moon was dead and this was the time for the dances to the river gods, but since there was a death in Gankwe all the gods might be danced to, for in times of important rituals, like death or the breaking of mourning or harvest festivals, it was not necessary to wait for the day sacred to each god to dance.

"They dance well at Gankwe," said our informant, as he sat by, and then after listening for a few moments he added, "They're dancing already."

We, too, walked out on the path to listen, and gradually we separated the sound of the falls above our camp from what seemed like the pulse of the night itself.

"It doesn't boom, does it?" we asked each other, remembering the accounts of impressionable travelers.

Soon Sedefo himself appeared and another, and we started for Gankwe.

"*Waka koni*, Sedefo," called our host at camp as we put off. He was evidently uneasy about us and asked the paddlers to be careful, for it is not safe on the river at night with the rapids below and the spirits that hover about.

The paddles cut the water so soundlessly that it did seem as if the spirits were carrying the boat downstream.

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764 all its leaves, while the butt of the stick was whitened with sacred clay.

Now the ceremony was drawing to a close, and the leave takings were to be said. Sedefo thrust the branch over the coffin, where it was grasped at its whitened end by the dancer who a few moments ago had been so frenzied. The laughter of an instant before was stilled; there was no wailing. Distinctly the low voice of Sedefo came to us as he addressed the corpse:

[539] *"The hour has come when we must part from you. What the Earth has decreed we cannot help. We have done for you what we could. We have given you a funeral worthy of you. You must care for us, and you must deliver us from all evil that may come upon us."*

As he finished, he slashed the branch in two with one quick stroke of his machete, so that the dancer held in his hand only the short whitened stump of what had been the long stem. The dancer then turned and walked sadly toward the river path still holding it in his outstretched hand, nor did he return to the village and the coffin.

Now the place that had been occupied by Sedefo was taken by an elder who held the second of the three sticks with their whitened ends. When Sedefo reappeared, he carried on one arm a little boy, the child of the deceased, and taking the dancer's place across the coffin he grasped the whitened end as the other had done. The separation from the group of men who had Kromanti spirits had taken place; the dead man was next to be separated from his family.

[539] *"You see, we bring your child. Now he is alone. Try to protect him, that he may live in health and prosperity, that he may not fall into the water, that fire may not burn him. Protect him in the bush, that he may not be harmed. Now we must separate you from him. What we must do we cannot help, for it is willed by the law of the Earth."*

With this, the second branch was slashed, and still holding the child Sedefo followed the Kromanti brother

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609 scratched like a "*tigri*"—a tiger, for this is how the Bush
123 Negroes name the jaguar. Later, when we saw him dance
115 the Tigri Kromanti dance, we witnessed one of the most realistic feline interpretations imaginable. But that is another matter.

Now Apanto was an obia man to be reckoned with, and his fellow villagers and the villagers of neighboring settlements treated him with a deference that his age alone could never have commanded. And it was this Apanto who now came up and said that he would sing the sacred Kromanti songs for our phonograph.

"You will not understand the songs. They will be in the Kromanti language," he warned us. "They are strong, and the machine must be strong to carry them."

It happens that a field phonograph is anything but strong. The mechanism is simple, since the instrument must be light enough to be carried about, and yet it often is subjected to all manner of hard usage. To this is added the
[126] hazard of the climate. The turntable is actuated by a belt running from the mechanism inside the case, and the ends of this belt are glued together. This, to be sure, we discovered later. At the moment, we met Apanto's challenge with assurance. We did not doubt that the machine was spiritually strong.

126 What he said about the Kromanti language was true.
533 The Kromanti tongo, of which we had been told during our
[197] first visit here, we were finding to be an actuality, and
● 539 although we took down the words as he sang them, aided in hearing them by the repetitions, their meaning was unknown to us. Some of them we learned later. Some of them we knew. "Obia" we knew concerned the spirit,
[196] the vague force known by that name, while "Amba" was
[551] a deity sacred to Saturday, and was given as a "day name" to women born on that day of the week. This, then, is what he sang:

"*Ma djeni ye-ye*
Obia kule ma djeni no-ko
Obia mo-ye

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Amba djeniyi, obia-mi yi-yi
Mo djeni-o
Mo djeni-e-ye
Obia mi-i
Man djeni no-ho
Obia mo-i
Amba djeni-e-i, obia-i-i
Man djeni no-ho, obia-i."

The music was slow and soft, and in Apanto's appealing voice the song took on a strangely moving quality. But as he sang, a stir went through the people who were listening.

"He calls his obia, ai."

"His obia will fight the spirit of the machine."

"The Bakra is cunning, but obia is strong. We shall see."

The song came to an end, the recorder was lifted. We looked at Apanto. "Will you sing another? See, the thing is not finished. There is room for more."

He looked. Yes, one could see there was room for more. Yes, he would sing more. This time the song was livelier, louder. As Apanto sang, he seemed to force the song into the horn, and this time there were no murmurs from those watching.

"*Yen-bo, yenbo,*
A yen-bo-bo no
Yen-bo, yenbo,
A yen-bo. . . ."

And with this the machine began to give way. There was a rattling sound, a scratching. The machine went more slowly, then stopped. About us the murmurs became excited. Hastily we fitted a new cylinder, hastily we tested it. It was no use. We soon found the cause. The glue had softened in the tropical dampness, and the ends had pulled loose. It was almost dark, and there was no sun to dry a newly applied coat of glue.

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484 [501] recognized the coat of a village chief, and by the size of the boat he knew that it belonged to the upper river, far, far beyond the stretches he had yet penetrated.

576 484 He spoke the greeting in the faintest of whispers, out of deference to a man of age and rank, and stopped his boat, for this village belonged to his own clan, and it was here that he would get from his mother's sister the cassava [962] bread which she had got ready for his journey up river. He got out of his boat gently; decorum demanded that he subdue his energy before the man of position. His palms rested on his knees for an instant, as he stood slightly [516] inclined before the older man, and what questions he answered, he did in speech which was punctuated with the ceremonial stammering demanded by the occasion. He had put his toga-like cloth over him and stood hesitating whether or not to take his paddle to the village with him, for he was so well known here that this settlement was almost as familiar to him as his own. But at last he leaned down and took up his paddle. This mature formality, in a village where he was still often looked upon as a boy, was prompted perhaps by this meeting with the chief, or by the new feeling of confidence he had, since he was taking the Bakra's boat up the river. But here he was, going up the embankment with the firm, slow step of the stranger.

484 The old chief had already started, having first made his 980 sacrifice of rum to the spirit of his boat by squirting it over [501] the finely carved head which appeared in relief on the 622 prow. And now, as he guided his canoe with the sure strokes 539 of his large steering paddle, he sang his prayer.

"*Kediamo, Kediampon,*
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors, and my a'ka,
I am taking this journey down the river,
I am going to the city,
Grant that I travel in safety,
Grant that the trip be joyous,
Grant that I meet with friends,

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ON THE SARAMACCA RIVER

Grant that I walk with strangers in friendship,
Grant that the white man deal fairly with me.
Great Sky God,
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors,
I thank you."

Before the sound of the old chief's voice had died away, Bayo was on the bank again with the great disks of cassava bread in his arms. He covered them carefully and was on his way. His aunt had provided nicely for him. She had given him a large bottle of palm oil as well, and now, if he could but shoot a monkey or a macaw while going up the river, he would have excellent food. The Bakra would be certain to have a drink or two for his paddlers, and some leaf tobacco; and, though he himself was not old enough to snuff tobacco, he would save it for a gift to the father of his betrothed.

He went back to his seketi.

"Ma, a Lamé
A sib' ko' de muye."

On the bank of the next village several women were at work washing clothes. Were they young? Ah, but he must hurry. Twice he had been overtaken.

"Tia, odi! tia, odi! tia, odi!" He spoke to each of the three women separately and finished his "Adiosi" with an extra flourish, for he knew as he paddled away that the circle of cicatrized kamemba and the snake incised in the small of his back below it would gleam in the sun and look alive to the women who watched him make off.

That Lamé obia was a powerful thing!

2

At Gankwe they had been up all night, for yesterday was the eighth day after death, and that night the ceremony of B'oko Dei had to be cared for—until night met day, the villagers said, there would be Ananси stories, and then, after the dawn, the elders would hold council, for one's

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had not acted well toward the Granman. It would be best if we did not stop there. At the others the Granman could assure us hospitality. Then there was talk of hauling wood and making rafts, for our host, who knew these people well, moved safri, too, until he at last felt the moment had come to talk about buying a boat from Ajako.

When the arrangements of the sale were concluded, Ajako came back to talk with us. He had heard that we had a machine which the Kromanti spirit had broken, was it true? Did it really go again? They said the Bakra had much cunning. They said the Bakra knew African magic.

The Bakra said he knew something about Africa. The Ashanti people, for instance, were a fine people.

"*Ma na Asante, na Sa'macca sem-* . . . —But the Ashanti are Saramacca. . . . " But he would go no further, having spoken only one syllable of the word for people. He became guarded. Yes, there were some Anago people from Africa on this Saramacca River, and Dahomey, and Loango, and Fanti; the Ibo peoples were not on this river. . . . And again he would say no more. Later, when we had changed the subject, he said as if in both gratitude and explanation, "*Na sa-i-'akisi, a tranga poi*—You ask about strong things."

But he would sing into our machine, if we liked. He would sing Kromanti, if we wanted him to do so. "I won't fight your machine," he said, smiling.

"*Anabobi, Anabobi,*
Anabobi, Anabobyo,
Tata Ando.
Anabobi, Ando,
Anabobi,
Tata Adjaini,
Anabobyo
Tata Fa'aku."

"They will understand this in Africa," he said, gravely, and then he moved toward the doorway and stood there

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501 609 "It is not good," he said aloud to us. "Its balance is not right. Look, it rolls . . . and besides, I have a kunu. I will go up in my own boat."

And so it was. Sedefo took his own boat up river, and another Gankwe boat was obtained, and there were four boats instead of three, and eight paddlers instead of six.

"Ya-hai! Kunu is costly for the white man as well as the black," Bayo said to Bibifo, his great-grandfather, for it was not his father, nor his grandfather, as he had later promised, who appeared to steer the boat in which Bayo was taking the Bakra and his woman up the river.

3

502 484 Bayo was at his best on the river. He loved it, and it treated him well. In the prow of the boat, swinging his pole-stick hand over hand, he steadily urged the boat upstream against the current, and sang as he poled.

[533] [539]

"A-yai-yo,
A-yai-yea,
Money is finished in Suriname
Lower Cayenna took it!
A-yai-yo,
A-yai-yea."

[533] Over and over he repeated the seketi, with tantalizing variations in rhythm and melody on the traditional air, to which he knew so many sets of words. In and out went the pole-stick. In, until it struck the sand with a soft caressing glide, then a hard push, and three short steps back along the boat until Bayo's hand reached the upper end of the wood, and a final thrust, then pull, and over, and in, and once again the three short steps.

The other boats had got ahead. In the distance close to the bank they followed one another.

"*Mbwogu, mbwogu*—Hurry!" said old Bibifo in back.

Bayo turned and grinned. "*Ai, mbwogu, mati, mbwogu*—Yes, hurry, friend, hurry," he twitted his great-grandfather,

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smaller boats were to be brought up each by its own men. Each selected a place, and the shrill shouted directions could be heard above the falling water. Up, up, they came, the man at the stern holding with his stick, the man at the head up to his shoulders in water, tugging, pulling, hauling the boat over. Once Asikanu's pole slipped, and his boat swung toward a rock, but it caught again and he held it with the fierceness of a man defending himself against an enemy, and then he, too, cut across and found the firmness of the friendly sandy bottom.

But when the five boats were at last together above the falls, out came machetes to sharpen the ends of the pole-sticks, for an encounter such as they had had the moment before shredded the hard wood into fiber.

Ahead the water was still. The hard work of this day was over. The men straightened their loin cloths and again began to make their way along the banks of the river. The village where we would camp that night was somewhere before us. The sun was nearing the treetops, and the shrieking pairs of parrots were flying over us to the west, seeking their roosting places.

The short dusk was upon us.

"It is not far," said Bayo, speaking of the village ahead.

"Will we get there before dark?"

"*Massa Gadu sabi*—God alone knows."

"*No fe', Bak'a*—Don't be afraid. We know the river."

The Bush Negro and his river! Seeing the prodigious strength of the men, their great knowledge of current and rocks and channels, one was not afraid. Softly the pole-sticks slid into the sand banks, softly the paddles dipped, and Bayo sang his seketi.

"*N'an g'wa a Lamé*
A s'ib' ko' de muye."

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her become pale again. This may happen to you when you get to the Mamadam."

As he spoke, he began to beat on the table the drum rhythm which calls the river god, and he sang,

"*Today, today, O Spirit,*
Hard times are upon us
Ingi-o.
Hard times are upon us.
Today, today, Boyo,
Hard times are upon us
Ingi-e."

And then he sang another song, which he said had been sung at the time when black people were running away from slavery, and is still heard at dances to the spirits of the river, the *watra ingi*, as the river gods are called in the city. In it, he called on the agida, the great drum upon which, in town as in the bush, the Negroes call the river gods, and on *Kopsi*, the name of one of the spirits of the water. This time he sang,

"*I will play the agida today,*
I will knock the agida today-o
Kopsi will foil the magic
Of the crowing cock.
O, I will play the agida today,
I will knock the agida, today-o,
Kopsi will foil the magic,
Of the crowing cock.
I will play the agida today."

3

As we gained the island where the shrine itself stood and looked about us from the high rocks of the sacred spot, there lay before us in the early morning light a scene of inexpressible beauty. At dusk the narrow strips of land which forced the river into three channels had been like dark machetes plunged into the body of the great stream.

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away. It seemed dangerous even to notice the strip of white cotton which showed high above the falls, though the stick from which it hung we could not see.

"Human beings do not go there," Bayo had said warningly. "Human eyes must also not go there."

But the shrine at the Mamadam is a friendly place. There a man finds a moment's ease. For a brief interval, at least, the voyager upstream or down rests there to get his breath, as he makes ready for a new start. Directly below the falls is a stretch of still water, which follows upon the wearisome portage at the Musumba Prati and the struggle with the rapids just above it, while, when continuing up river, the boatmen face a succession of rapids before another stretch of quiet water is reached. It is not strange, therefore, that no man, whatever his need to make time, will fail to stop at the Mamadam long enough to make known to the Mother of the River his errand and to ask for the continuance of her protection.

This shrine is the home of the Great Mother of the inland waters, she who, above all else, had secured to the ancestors of these Bush Negroes their freedom from slavery. In the city and on the plantations of the coastal region the Negroes, under states of possession by the water gods, sing of their longing to join those at the Mamadam.

Let me die on the river, O!
Let me die on the water, O!
All the Ingi spirits
Are at the Mamadam,
Let me die on the river, O!

Deep in the interior, if one of the elders, let us say a man of the Dahomey clan, is alarmed at the prospect of the white man penetrating their bush, some man can be looked to, then, to say reassuringly, "Have no fear. They will not come beyond the Mamadam!"

For this river is their own. "Once, long, long ago," the legend was told us, "this river was but a creek. There were no great trees here, no rocks. There were no boats, no

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782 241 535 Among the people of one group, the principal ceremony may be held in the clearing itself. The drums are brought, and men and women and children pray for fertility. The beautifully carved apinti drum sounds the invocation to the Great God and to the ancestors, while the tall agida drums are brought to call the earth spirits. Two by two the men dance susa, the dance which in pantomime reproduces an ancient warrior's combat with spear and shield, the winner taking on a new combatant, until the final winner is given a wand as a reward, and gains for himself the title of "G'aman of Susa" until the next dance is held. Other dances follow. Perhaps the women now line up in two long [585] rows facing each other, and dance bandamba, the dance [845] which celebrates marriage and the birth of twins, and the birth of a child who is born feet foremost. The motions are the slow rhythmic manipulations of the muscles of hips and [842] abdomen. It is a dance of fertility, danced by the very young girls as well as by those who have borne children. [888] But the women who are past the age for dancing sit with their men, arms interlaced, swaying to the rhythms of the songs they sing. . . . There are offerings to the earth spirits, poured upon the earth out of black obia pots and [1169] calabashes, while other offerings are set upon the ground for the ancestors.

In another settlement, the ritual would be chiefly carried on in the village itself, and there might be a local dance of [842] fertility, danced nowhere else on the river. "An old, old ancestress taught it to us," the villagers would say.

462 241 When it is time to plant, the woman plants with the man's help.

782 539 "When I plant a new field," said the younger woman, "I pray as I work."

And this is her prayer:

O Sky God, Mother of the Earth, Ancestors,
I am planting a field,
Make it bear;
People who come to me must eat,

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THE PROVISION GROUND

O spirits, you must help me.
Help me find food,
That I may give to those who come;
Help me find food,
That all those who come to me may eat.
I am planting pinda,
Make it come;
I am planting yams,
My yams must grow;
I am planting cassava,
Make my cassava yield;
I am planting rice,
Make it come;
Let the earth copulate well,
Let me, too, be fruitful;
Let me live by my work;
My children have gone down the river,
They have gone to the white man's country,
Let them live and be fruitful;
When they return to me,
Let them bring back possessions;
O spirits, I myself must live,
I have belongings,
Let my belongings live;
Mother of the Earth,
This new field which was found
Make it yield food for me,
Make it yield for those who come;
I have planted seed,
The seed must bear.
O Great God, Earth spirits, Ancestors,
I thank you.

6

After the planting, the life of the women is spent at the provision grounds for the greater portion of the year, for the crops must be carefully tended. The jungle is not hospitable to those who invade it, and it is only at the

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"It will go! . . . Anansi and Dew were great friends. 539 The two worked together, each helping the other. So they lived.

"Well, now, they each planted a field of corn. But the corn belonging to Dew was finer than Anansi's, and Anansi was envious. He wished that he had the field which belonged to Dew. So he said to Dew, he said: 'Your corn is fine, but mine is finer. If mine were like yours, I should cut it, so that it might come up better.'

"But Anansi was lying. When you cut corn, it will not grow again. He was deceiving Dew."

Now came the voice of our town man, as he offered the first "cut" to the story: "Bato! I was there!"

"What have you to say?"

With this came the song. The one that he chose was in 539 the Kromanti language, and later he told us it was a komfo 533 song, one which taking its name from the African Ashanti word for priest, calls on the Ashanti earth spirits to bring the singer a magic wand which, when touching his head, will make him possessed by the earth gods. And as leader, he began:

Asanti boyo
Da mi widya
Akolo!

The others responded in chorus

Akolo, Akolo, Abanu ba.

Singer and chorus repeated verse and refrain, until our boy shouted, "Go on with your story, man!"

"And so, my friends, Dew cut his corn.

"But in the afternoon, when people passed, they saw that the corn had been cut. And they asked one another: 'What made Dew cut his corn? It was such fine corn.' Dew said it was Anansi who had made him do it. Then the people told him it would not grow again.

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● 539 533 "And Dew said to them, he said, 'Well, all right. He tricked me with corn, but I am going to trick him with his mother.'"

Now came another interruption: "Bato! I was there!" and this time the song that cut the story was one of the spirit Sofia Bada. He is strong, and to dance for him is "heavy," a priestess of the city had told us. The words that were sung were a challenge sung by this warrior spirit of Allada, one of the ancient West African kingdoms.

Come try me
I am the man.
Come feel me,
I am the man
I am Sofia Bada
The strong man in Allada
Come try me,
I am a man.

"Let the story go on," said the singer.

"The story will go on. . . . So Dew worked hard until he had enough to buy himself a scythe, a hoe, an axe, and all manner of implements and clothes. And then he worked some more until he had put by some money.

"Then he went to his mother, and he said, 'Well, mother, I am going to do this. I am going to say that you are dead. You must hide upstairs, and I will set to work to make a coffin and to arrange for the burial.'

"And he did that. He sent word to all the animals that his mother died. And all the animals came together for the burial, and with them came Anansi.

"Now, Dew had it all arranged. He hid his mother underneath the plank on which the coffin rested, and placed beside her all the things that he had bought. He knew how greedy Anansi was.

"And so, before they were ready to take up the coffin, he began to wail, 'Ai, mother, see how you leave me. Not even an axe have you left for your son. Your son has not a single tool.'

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"As he said this, all the things began to come out from under the plank. Anansi picked them up, and wished his own mother would die at once so that he might have these, too. Dew went on crying. He now begged his mother for some money. His mother flung the money at him. And so the burial went off well, and the mourners went their way.

"But now, day after day, Anansi and his mother quarreled. Anansi said, 'Why cannot death come to you as it did to Dew's mother?' Then one day he and his mother quarreled again, and in his anger he took up a stick and struck her, killing her."

Again there was the voice: "Bato! I myself was there!"

And the song was taken up:

A fine man is Amusi
A fine man.
If you believe in God
You must believe in Amusi.

"Anansi now did just as Dew had done. He fixed the plank properly, and began to weep just as Dew had wept, but nothing at all came of it. So they buried his mother.

"A week later, Dew had his mother come to the field, and when Anansi saw Dew's mother, he said: 'Friend Dew, isn't that your mother I see there?'

"He said, 'Yes, it is my mother. You deceived me about my corn. Now I have tricked you with your mother.'

"And so Dew's mother was alive, but Anansi's mother was dead. It is ended."

2

Now Asikanu spoke. "Mato!"

"Tongoni!"

"I go into the bush to hunt. I greet the living, but they do not answer me. I greet the dead, and they speak."

This time Kasanya, who had sat dozing on his stool, heard and knew the answer.

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●539 "I go into the bush to hunt. I step on the green leaves, and there is silence. I step on the dry leaves, and there is a crackling sound. . . . I have pulled the riddle."

We turned to Sedefo, as Kasanya finished speaking.

"Now, Bak'a, I will tell you a story," he said. "It is about a man, a hunter, who saved three beings, a human, a snake, and a rat. Who would you say showed his gratitude in the end? The human being? Well, you will hear. It is late, and Kasanya is almost asleep. I will tell it to you without cutting. Listen to the story. You will like it."

And this was the story:

Hireti!
Daieti!
Listen well!

There was a man who went to the bush to hunt. He walked and walked, and walked so far until . . . he heard someone calling for help from inside a great pit. So he looked in the pit, and saw Human Being, Snake, and Rat.

Now, he said to himself, he said, "Snake is a bad animal. Rat is bad, too. I will help Human Being."

But after a while, as he thought it over, he said, "I will help all three, Snake, Rat, and Human Being who is like myself."

So Snake took his path, and Rat went on his way, and the Hunter took Human Being to his own house. But no thanks did he get from these three, whom he had saved from death itself.

Now Rat began to study what to do to help the man who had done him so great a favor. So he went to the King's treasure house and gnawed through a plank, and he stole much money. He brought it to Hunter as payment for having saved him from death.

So Hunter became a rich man. He bought new boats, and new axes. He bought beads and bracelets for his women, and cloths for himself. He built himself a new house and he found for himself another wife. He bought so many new things. . . .

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But now, the Human Being he had saved was still living 539 ●
with him, and he saw what was happening. So he went to the Granman, and he told on Hunter. The Granman sent word to all the elders of the kingdom to come together for a *lanti krutu*—a court assemblage; a man was to be judged. And Hunter was thrown into prison.

As the news spread from village to village, Snake came to hear of it. He studied what to do to help Hunter who had saved him from death. Now, the King of that country had a beautiful daughter. Snake said to himself, he said, "If I bite the King's daughter, and then show Hunter a medicine to save the Princess from death, they will free him."

So Snake went to the house of the King, and bit the King's daughter. Then he hurried back to the bush, and broke off some leaves. The leaves were medicine for saving the Princess from the hands of Death. So he carried them to the Hunter in prison, and showed him how to make the medicine for curing the Princess.

Meanwhile, the King called on all the doctors in the village to come to his house and cure his daughter, the Princess. But not one of them could produce a medicine to help her. So the King sent messengers to every part of his kingdom to say that whoever knew of a medicine to cure his daughter would get half of his kingdom, and would marry the Princess.

Now the Hunter sent a message to the King that if he could leave the prison, and go to the King's house, he would cure the Princess. The King said to the messenger, he said, "All right. Bring him here." When Hunter came, the King said to him, he said, "All these clever doctors tried and tried and could do nothing, and you think you can cure my daughter!"

The Hunter said to the King, he said, "Ya-hai, my King. I am the very man who can cure her."

All the people of the village came to the King's house to see the man who said he could cure the King's daughter. So Hunter took the weeds he had been given by Snake, and crushed them well, and made his medicine. And this

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539 medicine he rubbed into the wound which Snake had made when he bit the Princess. In an hour the Princess was better, and soon she was well.

The King was very happy. He caught Human Being who had betrayed Hunter, and put him into the same prison where Hunter had been. But Hunter, who made the medicine, married the King's daughter, and became King of the land.

"It is ended," concluded Sedefo, "and I myself was there, and my daughter danced bandamba at the wedding!"

5

When Sedefo finished, it was almost midnight. Kasanya and Asikanu had sometime before gone to their hammocks. And now Sedefo, too, rose to go.

"*D'u mundu*," he said, as he went out. "Sleep well, all."

"*Ai-yo, so s'yepi-o!*—Yes, and do you sleep well, too!" Our boys sang back their response.

Since both they and we were still wide awake, they each offered to tell a short tale. But they told many stories, for there was a quality in the deep bush that night that allowed neither them nor us, unaccustomed to the jungle as we all were, to rest.

539 126 We no longer recall the exact tales they told. But later we had opportunities to record many more than just the ones they told there in the provision ground. Many were long, longer than we can give here. Many were the same as those we heard told by the Bush Negroes but which, told at night at festivals for the dead, with all the element of dramatization that went with the telling, we could not record in our notebooks. We group some of those which, for us, hold something of the quintessence of the mind of the Suriname Negroes.

Anansi Becomes a Preacher

539 Anansi asked the King to permit him to become a preacher. The King said, let him go to church one Sunday

M. Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1958-1959) 1934
[illegible] Bush Negroes [illegible]
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and preach a sermon. The first Sunday Anansi preached, 539 ●
the King could not come to hear him. But the King gave him a black suit, and said he was to wear it the following week when he preached.

Now Anansi and Cockroach lived side by side. Beside the fence separating Anansi's yard from that of Cockroach stood a coconut tree. The tree grew in Cockroach's yard. It was not a large tree, but it did have a bunch of nice coconuts on it. The coconuts hung right above the fence of which one side belonged to Anansi, and the other side to Cockroach.

One day Anansi took his machete and cut the bunch of coconuts exactly in two. When Cockroach saw this, he said to Anansi, he said, "Why did you cut down the coconuts? The tree is in my yard. You had no right to cut them." Anansi said, "Yes, but didn't you see how they were hanging? how one-half hung on your side, and one-half on mine?" Cockroach said, "All right. I'll get even."

On the Saturday before Anansi was to preach his sermon in church before the King, he told his wife to air his black suit. His wife took the suit and hung it over the fence. So now Cockroach took his machete and cut off that part of the suit which was on his side.

In the morning the King went to church to hear Anansi preach. But Anansi could not come, because he had no suit to wear. The King was angry. He had Anansi put in jail. Anansi said to Cockroach, he said, "You there, as long as I live I will never forget this. As long as I live I will remember what you have done. You made me lose my job."

How Death Came to the City

Death had not yet come to the cities. He lived in the deep bush. But one day Anansi had no food. It was a time of famine. He took his hunting bag and his gun and went to hunt. He worked his way deep into the bush, and then walked all through it, but not one animal did he meet. So he walked on and on, until one day he came to Death's village. Death was sitting in his doorway.

Herskovits & Herskovits B-6 (1928-1930) 1934
[illegible] Bush Negroes [illegible]
Surinam

• 539 Anansi was respectful. He said, "Howdo, Father Death." And he said, "Hunger is killing me. I have combed the entire bush for an animal, but not one did I find to kill."

Death said, "Come inside. I will give you some food." Death took him into the cook-house where much meat was being barbecued. When Anansi saw all this meat, his mouth began to water. Death gave him a fine portion of meat, and he ate until he had had enough.

Anansi said, "Many thanks." And he said, "But who are you who have so much meat to barbecue?"

Death said to him, "Do you not know that I am Death?"

Anansi said, "I see, Father Death, and that is why you have so much meat, and I walked through the entire bush and could find nothing." Then he said, "I am going to ask you a favor. I myself have eaten, but my wife and children have had nothing to eat. Give me some of this meat that I may bring them food."

Death said, "All right. Take that piece over there."

When Anansi came home, he said, "Sa Akuba, I found a place to get food. I do not have to bother looking around for something to eat, because when we have no food, I can go there and take it. Or better still, I can go and steal."

So whenever Anansi had no food, he went to the man Death's village, and stole Death's meat.

Death came home one day and noticed that some of his meat was missing, but he did not know who was at fault, until finally he lay in wait for the thief. Just as he hid in a corner, Anansi came. Anansi filled a basket with meat.

Death said, "Heh! So it is you who are the thief! Why did you do this?" But Anansi had no time to answer properly, for he set out on a run. Death ran after him. Death ran, and Anansi himself ran, too.

But when they came to the city, Anansi turned and saw Death at his heels. Anansi began to call in a loud voice, "Living-people all, shut your houses! Death is come!"

So, you see, Death came to the city, and many people have died because of the thief Anansi. If Anansi had not

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stolen Death's meat, Death would have remained quietly 539 ●
in the deep bush.

The Devil Has a Bad Name

Now the Devil said to a man one day, "No matter what 539
good I do, I get a bad name for it." The man would not 716
believe him. The Devil said, "Very well, I will show you."

So the Devil went to God, and he said to God, he said, "You put a stone on the path along which men travel, and I will put a bag of money there. Then we will see what happens."

Well, they did this. God put down the stone, and the Devil the bag of money. One day a man came down the path and stubbed his foot against the stone. Instantly he cried, "Ah, the Devil put the stone there that I might hurt my foot!" Later another man came along and saw the money. He took up the bag and called out, "God be praised! I thank you, Master, for letting me find this money!"

The Devil said, "You see how it is? I put the gold there, but it is God who receives thanks, while I am cursed for the stone God put on the road. It is as I said. The Devil cannot look for fairness in this world."

The Tar Baby

The King had a plantation where there were many fruits, 539
and plantains, and other kinds of food. But someone was stealing the fruit and the crops. So the King had them put a large tar-baby in the field.

Now the thief used to come at night, and this thief was Ba Anansi. When he saw the image he became alarmed, and approached it with flattering words. Timidly he said to it, he said, "Father, how are you?" But he did not get an answer.

So he said, "If you do not speak to me, I will slap you!"

The image did not speak. Anansi struck him a blow, but his hand stuck. He said, "If you do not let me go, I will

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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539 give you one with my other hand," and Anansi struck again. That hand stuck, too.

He said, "If you do not let me go, I will butt you." But when he butted him, his head stuck. So he said, "If you do not let me go, I will kick you." And then he kicked him.

But Anansi could do nothing more, for his head, his hands, and his feet were fast. So he had to remain there until they came and found him. And when they let it be known that Anansi was the thief, the King said that Anansi was to be killed.

The day Anansi was to die, he sent for his children and said to them, he said, "Children, you see I am about to die. What can you do to save me?"

Now each one of his children proposed some foolish thing, until the youngest one spoke. He said, "Father, you know what I am going to do? I am going to climb a tall tree and hide there. Then, when they come to put you to death, I will sing,

"They kill Anansi till . . .
They kill the Spider till . . .
The whole country will be flooded,
All the people will die,
The King's wife will die,
The King's daughter will die,
The King himself will perish,
Anansi alone will remain."

Now, when the King heard the voice singing, he asked, "What is that?"

Anansi answered, "Tye! Hearken, my King. God himself pleads for me!"

The King said, "It is not true. A thief must be punished."

But Anansi replied, "Tye! You will hear, my King, that it is the truth, because God will again speak for me." And soon the voice was again heard singing,

"They kill Anansi till . . .
They kill the Spider till . . .

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The whole country will be flooded,
All the people will die,
The King himself will perish,
Ananzi alone will remain."

Then the King became disturbed. He was afraid. . . . And so he came to free Ananzi.

Why Chicken and Butter Are Always Found Together

Chicken and Butter were great friends. They lived together. Every morning early they went for a walk. Now, Chicken was always the last to return, and every morning Butter was home early. Chicken did not know that if Butter walked in the sun he would melt, and that was why he was always home first.

One morning, when they left the house, Chicken took the key and carried it away with her. When Butter came back, he could not get in. So he stood in the doorway and waited. When the sun came up Butter melted.

Now Chicken returned, and she saw what had happened to Butter. She ran and called her neighbor to come. When the neighbor came, Chicken said to him, she said, "What shall we do with Butter?"

The neighbor said, "Bring a knife and I will show you."

But Chicken had no sooner brought the knife than her neighbor took it, and cut Chicken's neck. Then he put her in the pot with Butter, and cooked the two.

And that is why to this day we cook Chicken with Butter. Now the neighbor was Cockroach, and the proverb says: "You are Cockroach; you will never get justice from Chicken."

Ananzi Gives a Feast on the Mountain Top—Turtle Gives His in the Water

Ananzi decided to give a feast. Now he did not want Turtle to come, but since he was inviting all the animals, he had to ask Turtle, too. He said, "I will see to it that the boy Turtle does not eat a morsel of my food." So Ananzi sent word to all the animals that on a certain day he would

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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● 539 give a great feast, but that it would be held on top of a mountain. On the day of the feast all the animals came together to eat with Anansi.

Now, when they were all gathered, and the preparations were done, Anansi said, "We are ready to eat, but before we can begin, all must have clean hands." And Anansi said to Rabbit, he said, "Ba Kon'koni, you are a clever fellow. Look around for me, and see if there is anyone whose hands have sand on them."

Rabbit went from one animal at the other, examining their hands. Then he came to Turtle. He said, "Friend Turtle, you must go wash your hands. See, there is sand on them." So Turtle went back down the hill to wash his hands. Now when Turtle walks, crawling he crawls from one place to another. He does not go fast. So the whole time he was away the animals had been eating. When he returned to the table, half the food was gone.

Now just as he sat down at the table, Anansi said, "Friend Turtle, let me see if your hands are clean now." Turtle showed his hands. Again they were full of sand. Anansi said, "Ba Turtle, the rules are that everybody must have clean hands, so you must go wash your hands once more. You cannot eat otherwise." So again Turtle washed his hands. He washed them so many times, but, since he could not walk any other way, his hands were always dirty when he came to the table. So Turtle did not eat at Anansi's feast.

Turtle went away, and he said, "Anansi caught me this time, but I am going to get even with him."

So now Turtle gave a birthday party. He sent for all the animals to come to his party to eat with him. He knew that Anansi would come, too. So he said that his party would be held under water. He knew that Anansi was light and would not be able to stay under water. He did this so he could catch Anansi.

When all the animals were getting ready to go to Turtle's, Anansi studied what to do. He knew that he could not stay down under water. So he borrowed a coat and a pair of

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trousers, and put them on. Then he gathered many stones, 539
and put them in the pockets. When he was heavy enough, he went down under the water.

Now the time came for them to come and eat. Turtle looked about and saw Anansi under water. He saw how Anansi had put stones in his pockets. At once Turtle said to them all, he said, before they sit down at the table they must take off their coats. Anansi was troubled when he heard Turtle say this. He thought, "If I take off my coat, I will at once float to the surface. The stones in my pockets keep me down." So Anansi could not take off his coat.

But when Anansi came to the table, Turtle said to him, he said, "Didn't I say everybody was to take off his coat? You must take off yours. When you gave your feast you did as you liked. When I give mine, I do as I like, too."

So Anansi took off his coat.

But no sooner did Ba Anansi take it off, than he rose to the top of the water. He got no food to eat. His greed had caused this to happen to him.

Anansi Rides Tiger

One day Ba Anansi went to the house of the King and said to the King, he said, he rode Tiger.

The King said, "A little spider like you! It is another of your lies. I don't believe you. I will ask Tiger." But Anansi said, "King, you can believe me. You will see that it is true."

The King, however, sent a messenger to Tiger, asking him to come to him. Tiger was delighted that he was asked to go to the King's house. He wondered, "Now what kind of a message does the King have for me?"

But as he arrived at the King's house with such pleasant feelings, the King said to him, he said, "Tiger, does a strong animal like you allow little Anansi to ride him?" Tiger was angry. He said, "King, I will go at once and make Anansi come to you to tell you that he lied."

One of Anansi's children was playing in the village. He met Tiger on the road. Tiger said to him, he said, "You

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539 boy! Where is your father? I will show him if he can lie about me!"

Now Anansi had already told the boy what he had done. Anansi said to him, he said, "If you see Tata Tiger, then, when he asks for me, you must tell him I am sick. Tell him I have fever." So the boy said to Tiger, "Tata Tiger, my father is sick. He lies at home, shaking with fever."

But Tiger said, "That's no affair of mine. He must come to the King's house with me, even if I have to carry him!" So he went to Anansi's house, and said to his wife, "Sa Akuba, where is that boy Anansi?"

Sa Akuba answered, "Tata, he is sick. He has a bad fever."

But Tiger said, "Where is he? Let me see him." When Sa Akuba brought Tiger to Anansi's bed, Tiger said, "You boy Anansi! What was this you said at the King's house?"

Anansi said to him, he said, "Tata Tiger, I am sick. The King lied to you. I did not say anything."

"That makes no difference. You must come with me to the King's house."

"Tye, Tata Tiger! See how I am trembling! You can see that I cannot travel. Please wait until I am better!"

"No, no. I can't wait. You must come right now, this very day."

"All right, Tata. But I cannot walk. How am I going to get to the King's house?"

"Come sit on my back. I will carry you there."

Anansi waited for a moment. Then he said, "Tata, I have a small bag here and a blanket. May I take them with me to use when I get cold?"

"All right. Take them. But you must come right away."

So Anansi climbed up on Tiger's back, and Tiger went on his way toward the King's house. Anansi sat shivering there, and he shook so that Tiger called to him, "You boy, why do you do this? Sit still!"

"But Tata," said Anansi, "it is the fever. I have something here. Won't you let me put it in your mouth so that I can use it to hold on to?"

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Tiger said, "All right," and hurried on. But Anansi shook again, and Tiger said once more, "You boy Anansi! Why do you do this? Do you think that if you carry on this way I won't take you to the King's house to show him how you lied?" 539

But Anansi said, "Tye, Tata, it is the fever. Look, I have something here that is like a saddle. Won't you wait until I can put my feet inside it so I can sit a little better?"

"That doesn't concern me, so long as we get on. Do what you like, so long as you go with me to the house of the King."

So Anansi put the saddle on Tiger, and they went on. When they had gone farther, Anansi saw the King's house facing them in the distance. He began to shake again. He shivered and shivered, and Tiger said, "You boy! Why are you carrying on so? When you see the King's house you begin to tremble, is that it? I will teach you to lie!"

Anansi only said, "Tata, it is the fever. I am shivering. It is the fever, and, besides, a mosquito just bit me."

"Didn't I tell you that was no affair of mine? Whether you shiver or whether you don't shiver, go you must. Don't you see the King's house, there ahead?"

"But Tata, I have one last favor to ask of you. I have a small whip here. Won't you let me strike at the mosquitoes with it? Then maybe I won't shiver so much."

"All right, I don't care. I only want to bring you to the King's house to show how you lied about an important man like me."

So Anansi had the bit and the saddle on Tiger, and his whip was in his hand. And when he saw all the people in front of the King's house, he gave Tiger three lashes with the whip. As Tiger jumped in the air, Anansi cried "Kon! Kon!" as though he were driving a horse, and Tiger became so angry that he started to run faster.

But Anansi pulled at the bit and called, "King! King! Come look at Anansi riding Tiger!"

And so the King said to Anansi, "Well, since you have brought me this horse, you can stay inside my house as long

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539 as you live." This is the reason why to this very day, Anansi lives inside the King's house.

The King's Beard

It is said, "There is nothing in darkness that will not come to light. . . ."

There was a King who had a very long beard. But he did not want anyone to know that he had a beard. But someone saw him when he did not think anyone was there. This was Ba Anansi. He became angry and called people to kill that person. For he did not wish anyone to know that he had a beard.

So they dug a great hole for Anansi. When they brought Anansi to the hole, he put his mouth to it and whispered, "The King has a beard-o. . . ." But no one heard him.

Three years later a tree sprang up, right where there was the hole to which Anansi had put his mouth. And marked across the bark of the tree was:

"The King has a beard-o!"

Tiger Entertains the Monkeys

It was a time of famine. Tiger had nothing to eat. He studied what to do. He went and made a large kettle, and he made a lid for the kettle. Then he called all the baboons together and said he was going to give a cinema play. They must come and see. When the baboons came, he went inside the kettle. He pretended that he was putting in the film, and he said when he called out "Warm!" they must take him out. Now he had put fire under the kettle, and when he called out "Warm!" the baboons raised the lid, and let him out.

He said, let all the baboons go inside the kettle now to see the cinema. But one young baboon did not go inside. He hid in a tree top, and from there he watched what was happening. Now, once the baboons were inside the kettle, the Tiger stirred the fire underneath it. So the baboons were cooked, and all were killed. And so Tiger came by his food.

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Now, another time there was again famine. Tiger called together all the monkeys, and said let them come and see the cinema play. But this time when the monkeys came, the young baboon who hid in the tree top the last time, said to the monkeys, he said, "When Tiger goes inside the kettle, you must not lift the lid when he cries out, 'Warm!' You must say, 'When a thing is warm, then a man's teeth must show.' " And so, when the Tiger went into the kettle, and called out, the monkeys did not raise the lid. And so Tiger died.

Gun Is Dead

Anansi borrowed a gun from Hunter, and sent word to all the animals that they must come to bury Gun. Gun, he said, was dead. All the animals rejoiced to hear that Gun had died, for Gun was an evil thing. It was he who had been killing off all the animals in the bush. So they were happy to hear that their enemy, Gun, was dead, and they came to the funeral.

Now Anansi made a trap, and he put Gun inside it, and said they would go and bury him. But Anansi made everyone pass in front of the coffin, and the Gun was pointed right at them. His own children carried the trap, and Anansi himself sat on top of Gun.

When Anansi saw all the animals lined up in single file facing Gun, he began to shoot. All the animals died.

And so Anansi got food. Ba Anansi is very cunning.

How Goat Came to Live at Home

Goat went to make a shelter. He cut one post and put it down, and went for another. But now when he brought the second, he found many posts alongside of the one he himself had put there. Back into the bush he went now for palm leaves, but when he returned, there was the shelter all made. Tiger had made it. And so Goat and Tiger met, and they talked it over, and they decided they would live together.

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REBEL DESTINY

539 Now they made one condition. Goat was to go in search of food one day, and Tiger the next day. The first day Tiger went. He made a kill, and brought it home, and they ate. When Goat went, he killed nothing. The following day Tiger went. He made a kill, and brought it home. The day after Goat went and killed nothing.

Now, one day, Tiger went and killed a deer, and brought him home. But Goat would not eat, because Deer is Goat's uncle, and if he had eaten the meat, then he would have been eating his own uncle. But Tiger was angry. He said, "Day after day you ate what I killed, but today you refuse to eat. Yet when you yourself go, you kill nothing, and bring nothing home."

And now when the little Tigers played with the little Goats, the little Tigers said, "My father will show you-all!"

Mother Goat said, "As Father Tiger talks, so the children of Father Tiger talk." And she told the little Goats to watch out for Tiger, because already Tiger had killed their uncle. But Father Goat said all little Negro children must play together.

Now Goat went to hunt, and he met Man. He said to Man, "Day after day I go hunting, but I never kill." Then Man gave him something, and he said to Goat, "When you see an animal coming toward you, point at it, and call out 'Take care!' and that instant the animal will fall down dead."

Just as Goat took the thing Man gave him, he saw Tiger's grandfather approaching. He pointed his finger, and called out, "Take care!" That moment grandfather Tiger was dead. Goat brought him home. But now, when he came, Tiger would not eat, because the dead animal was his grandfather.

The following day, Goat went again. This time he killed Tiger's brother, and brought him home. Tiger would not eat.

But now the little Goats said to the little Tigers, "Father will show you-all!"

And Mother Tiger said to Father Tiger he had better look out for Goat. Twice he had gone to the bush to hunt,

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
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and twice Goat had brought back with him members of their family. And so when Goat again went hunting, Tiger followed him softly, and as he spied on Goat, he saw his uncle Tiger coming. And he saw how Goat pointed at him and called out, "Take care!" and how that very instant his uncle Tiger fell down dead. 539

Father Tiger hurried home, and said to Mother Tiger and the little Tigers, "Let us escape at once. Goat has something which he points at whomever he meets. When he does it and calls out 'Take care!' they all die."

And Tiger and his whole family made off into the bush as fast as they could go. They left the house to Goat.

So it is ended. And so it is that when someone boasts of the strength of his clan, or his family, or his clan's magic, or his own spirits, then we say to him:

"There are men on the upper river,
There are men on the lower river, too!"

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782 "Tonight there will be dancing for you," And'u said, when we left the shrine. "I will go and pray again before the dance, and then I will go to my hammock early, for I leave at sunrise. We will meet again at the G'aman's."

The bassia's wife followed us to our house.

[562] "You are a woman, yet you went inside the shrine. Maybe you do have gods, white woman. When you go in again will you pray to the Earth Mother for the woman Kupa, who is my sister? Twice she bore girl children, and both [842] sleep. Now she is with child again. She wears many obias about her neck, and daily she washes with white clay. She is the woman with the wooden obia doll hanging between her breasts. No, not the one who has the small black sack about her neck. Any woman who is with child wears that. You will know her when you see her. She is beautiful."

7

535 The dance was held in the bassia's quarter, in front of one of his houses. The bassia was a man of wealth. He had three wives, while the chief had but two. Whether one of the three was only nominally his wife and had come to him at the death of a brother, we were unable to learn, but that [342] his means were large was apparent. The house where his personal possessions were stored was built high on posts. A house so raised stood out from those about it and bore the same name as the moon. Underneath it, in the shelter made by the posts, lay a partly made drum, some carved wooden implements, and carpenter's tools. There was also a forked stick in the ground upon which rested a black obia pot with water and weeds in it.

535 The children began the dancing.

533

Ayo, ayo
Ayo, ayei,
Agida comes,
[539] *Ayo, ayo,*
Earth spirits come,
Ayo, ayei.

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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535 men's Kromanti society. The elders had decided these dances were too violent to show to the white man who was with them for the night. Whatever of the esoteric the white man was to see was for the Granman himself to decide. To introduce the drums for the secular dances, and the half-sacred awasa, would be dangerous, for once the drums were there, and the spirit seized one of the players, he would begin to call the gods. When the gods came the dancing would take place until the spirits were satisfied.

"There will be no drums," said the bassia aloud. "There is no one to play them."

No drums!

Again the whispering began. The eagerness, the energy which had seemed to float in the darkness from one to another of the waiting figures began to be dissipated. The men and women still waited, but they were listless.

[533] [539] The little girl sang,

"*The kogbwa drum*
Sounds Toné."

And the chorus sang,

"*Give us Toné.*"

The bassia who was master of ceremonies noticed the loss of interest with displeasure. It had not been the intention of the elders, when they had made this decision, to have it interfere with the reception of the strangers. He had counted on having spirited secular dancing.

"Friend," he said to the young obia man, "get the dancing started."

He turned again and again to the young man who was being disciplined in the way of the gods, exhorting him to beat time faster, to sing louder. And to the women he shouted, "Shake, women, shake—*chaka!*"

The dancing grew lively.

[123] The white man had learned the words of the refrain, and was singing with them. Master Nigger! here was a white man who could sing their songs. The white woman had

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535 above the roof, like great horns, appeared to sway now to
533 one side, now to the other.

The hand clapping grew louder and faster, and faster still. The rhythm changed. Now the dancers were in pairs, feet interlocking and raised from the ground, while they danced each on one foot. It was one form of the *banya* dance. This was what was danced to the ancestors before the opening of sacred dances.

The bassia stirred uneasily and soon sought out the young obia man who was standing by. They whispered together for a few moments, and then the bassia spoke aloud.

"It is late, friends. Day will soon be coming. Let us end the dancing. Let us go to our houses."

He turned and whispered to his wife, who came forward with a smoking oil lamp in her hand. Like a knife she thrust herself straight between the pairs of interlocked figures, and began singing a slow moving song.

[539]

It is late,
Soon night will meet day,
Let us go to our hammocks,
Let us go to our homes,
Let the gods go to their homes.

In and out she went, separating the rows of figures, and her beautiful voice cast a spell over the dancers. With feet flexed, they stood poised to go on with their dance, yet did not move. The hand clapping stopped, and the singing. There was but the voice of the bassia's wife, who cut her way through the massed body of dancers, her sleeping child on her back, her oil lamp held before her, as she walked, arm outstretched. The dancers gave way before the flame in the small lamp, but still they stood there, their faces disturbed. It was as though food had been brought to whet their appetites and was quickly snatched away.

At last a dancer reached for a lamp which was held by an old woman, and then another woman reached for hers.

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A NIGHT AT S'EI

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" . . . *It is late,*
Soon night will meet day . . . "

they chanted, as others joined them. Dancing to the slow rhythm of the singers, lamps in hand, all took up the song, until the bassia's wife led the way down the path. In a few moments the flicker of the oil lamps radiated in many directions, and the quieted dancers followed by their families went home singing. [35A]

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Chapter XII

WOMEN AT WORK

I

A WOMAN stood in the council house, dipping her hand into a calabash and spraying the ground and walls. East and west, north and south she turned, with her fingers pointed downward toward the hard clay floor, then with palm upturned sending the water toward the thatch.

Evil spirits,
You must not come here,
You must dwell in the bush,
The bush is big.

O spirits,
Do not come here,
Remain in the bush,
The bush is big.

Startled by the white woman, who had taken her unawares, she allowed no apology. Her wet hand went quickly to her lips to show that not a word was to be uttered. In silence she withdrew, beckoning the white woman to follow her, and not until they were well away from the house did she break her silence.

"Come with me. Inside there no one must speak."

Some day, before we left, she might be able to tell what she had done and what weeds had gone into the water.

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
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hissing sound so startled her that she faced quickly about. Now two other eyes met hers. They belonged to a figure on a low bench, seated with its back to the door, facing the darkness of the unbroken walls, but with head turned to watch the stranger. The figure was in white—tunic, cloths about the breasts and on the head, arms, throat, and body, all were white. But of a greater whiteness yet was the terrifying, macabre face in which the line of the mouth alone, and the living black of the eyes, showed. Beside this white figure stood a streaked glass tumbler, filled with a whitish liquid. This tumbler had been at the lips of the white form when the stranger turned to see where the hissing came from. Now that the glass was replaced, the whitened hands began kneading a piece of clay and rubbing face and throat and arms with the hands. While doing this, the body swayed and the voice chanted.

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"From the river I come,
And I say to you all,
Greetings.
All you Negroes,
Be greeted.

From the river I come,
I say to the white woman,
Greetings.
I say you came as a friend,
I say you came not for evil.

From the river I come,
I say to you all,
Be greeted."

Now the first woman moved closer to the stranger and put her arms about her, streaking her with clay.

"Ondyi, Ondyi-o!
I am Affi
I am Kantamasi-o!
Ondyi, ondyi,

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Woman, I care for you,
I will be your god."

There was consternation among the women who stood outside listening. The Akantamasu god was one of the strongest on the river. He ranked only slightly under the great obia spirits, which the Sky God when creating the world had sent as wisdom for the living to combat the capricious lesser gods, and humans who were dominated by evil spirits. Differing from the obia spirits, however, who befriended the living, and brought healing to them, the Akantamasu god was an avenger, surpassed alone by the yorka, the ghosts, who avenged by killing instantly when they chose, while the Akantamasu god killed more slowly.

But there was concern for the possessed woman, as well. She had spoken the name Affi, her day name, the name which summoned her soul. When not in a state of possession, she would never have spoken it before a stranger, except in a whisper to an obia man who came to cure her, or to a diviner to whom she came to ask why her soul was troubled. [551]

Presently the white figure rose, breaking the tension, and, chanting, went from the hut into the clearing. Affi and the white woman followed. In the light of the clearing, a faint resemblance could be seen in the grace of the body of the figure in white to the pleasant Amasina. Of the brown of her skin, only the ankles and feet showed.

Both of the possessed women began pacing back and forth in the clearing, in time to the rhythm of their songs, but while Amasina danced with an easy stride, Affi shook and quivered and moaned.

"When the gods come, we do not speak. We sing. The speech of the gods is song. So it is," one woman whispered. [553]

Another said, indicating Affi, "Her god troubles her. She gave you a strong god. Are you afraid?"

"When the god comes to you, you will speak tongues. Now you have two gods. When Kesekia comes to you, you will sing Kesekia songs, you will dance to him."

1tHerskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
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When a male snake god came, then it was easy to know, the women said. If the possessed one rolled face downward it was a male god, and he was courting the spirits of the earth, but if face upward then it was a female snake. "*Na muye opo-i-mbe gi 'a tapu*—The woman opens her womb for the sky," they said, using the precise image for one who was being wooed by the spirits who lived above.

3

When the white woman was about to enter the council house, Granman Yankuso called to her. He was standing in front of his house, surrounded by women, who were talking to him in low, excited voices.

"*Bak'a muye*—White woman," he said, looking at her searchingly, and saying nothing. "White woman," he repeated, after a short silence, "white mother, good morning. Are you awake?"

His voice sounded a little troubled, but not unfriendly. It helped the white woman to regain her self-possession.

"They sing well down below, Granman," she said, and went into the council house.

4

Whatever Granman Yankuso thought of the white woman's having witnessed the possession of the women of his village, he did not refuse permission to her and her husband to return to the hut.

Amasina and Affi were still in the clearing, dancing to their own songs. Women came up with their children, bringing more and more calabashes of rice. Amasina took up each child in her arms, and caressed it gently, streaking it with the white clay as she did so, and singing the while,

"*I come from the river.*
You shall be cooled,
You shall be well."

Affi's moaning had become more and more faint, and her pacing, by this time, was listless. Her god would not take

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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Saramacca

her into his power strongly enough to give her the release she craved. 787

Amasina sang,

"*I come from the river.*
I tell all you people,
This man, this woman
Are friends.
They come not for evil.

Go to the G'aman,
Say to him.
These people are friends,
They bring us no evil."

Then her god, speaking through her, sang an explanation to the white people. From the river he came, bringing healing to all those who were fevered, caring for all those who were sick. Those who could, came to him, but those who could not come, he would visit and bring them healing. Now he must make the round of the village, go to the houses, and see those who were ill.

Singing, Amasina beckoned us to follow her, and as she led the way she danced in undulating steps from one end of the village to another, visiting the sick, singing the cure her god was bringing them in the words he was speaking through her.

The white people could stay with her no longer. Word came that the boat which was to take them across the river to the village of the Granman's father was ready, and they must go. The women suggested, however, that if the whites cared to make a gift to the god who had spoken so well of them, it would be acceptable, and they hurried to their stores to get a gift.

As they passed the council house and turned toward the small hut behind it where their supplies were kept, they heard a new sound. It was a choking sound, torn from an unwilling throat. Seated quite alone on a low stool in front

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[539] •

"Wife of the G'aman,
I come from the river.
Go to the G'aman
Say to him,
These strangers are friends,
They bring no evil."

It was the god speaking, and the Granman's wife received with lowered head the words spoken through the priestess.

"Ai, my master. Ai, Massa Gadu," she said.

5

The Granman's paternal village was directly across the river from Asindopo Lantiwe. It was called Akisiamau, literally "Took with an outstretched hand," but whether there was also some meaning in the phrase not intended for the uninitiated, we could not learn. In size it was not much larger than the Granman's village, and again and again we recognized houses which were his by the crest-like carvings on the doorposts, that reproduced the design found not only at the side of the council-house door, but at the door of all other houses at Asindopo Lantiwe which were his.

361 643 [423]

Except for several old people who sat about in the shade and waited for the strangers to come to them with their greetings, the entire village followed us as we made our way down one path and another.

123

"*Bakʼa, Amiʼika Bakʼa, Amiʼika Fandya!*—White man. American white man, American Fandya!" the children called after us, as they ran at our heels, touching our canteens, our sun helmets, and shoes.

The Granman had spoken with especial fondness of his father's house, and it was there that we asked first to be taken. It was not occupied, we were told, and none might enter it. Above the top crosspiece white cotton was draped. Except that its door was closed, it showed no signs of being

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1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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peered into the inner darkness, the whites of their eyes moving with the movements of the strangers.

Gently the drummer laid the great cylinder of wood flat on the ground, and from the thatch took down a hard-wood stick, dark and smooth with use. The drum filled more than half of the wall near which it lay. Stooping, the drummer began to call the Vodu gods. It was the rhythm we had heard from across the river early in the morning. The drumming had sounded low and distant then, but in this small enclosure the volume of sound was deafening. It seemed to be pushing against the yielding woven walls, pushing outwards and up.

The rhythm was disturbingly irregular. There was, in the sense of the steady rhythms of the dances, no rhythm at all, and this uncertainty of beat added to the volume of sound racked the listeners. When we thought we heard a repetition of an interval, a sudden change in tempo brought us up with a start. On and on the man struck the drumhead, sounding the heavy beats with the stick, while with his free hand he kept up a running fire of obbligato to the message for the god.

The heads in the doorway began to move nervously this way and that as the message to the god continued, when suddenly they disappeared behind someone who was coming at a run. A moment later Dida was in the hut.

She was again possessed. Her body shook with the intensity with which she experienced her god, and her eyes glowed with a steady fire. Back and forth she paced, and when the drum had sounded, she addressed herself to it, listening for its voice and answering, listening again and answering in tones which grew more and more harsh. Then she turned to us, and began to chant

"I am the god Kesekia
From back of the prison,
From the French shore,
I come.
I am the god Kesekia."

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Once more she resumed her frenzied pacing, and from time to time as the drum spoke she whirled about and replied. Now and again she would repeat the phrases which the bassia said was the French snake god speaking—"Ti donc!" "Kesifo, kesifo!" "Ti donc!"

"Speak to the god," said the bassia. "Speak to him in the French tongue. He will answer you."

In spite of the bassia's urging, we stood silent, for it was crowded in the little hut, and Dida's god was not as genial a one as was Amasina's. Her body shook and quivered, her pupils were dilated, her voice became harsher as she turned to us with her hissing cries.

"Ti donc!

"Kesifo!

"Ti donc!"

For a moment, the god had done speaking on the drum. Gently the stick tapped against the wood, and the drummer's left hand was quiet. Then once more the roaring note began, and as the heads disappeared from the doorway, a second form shot inside.

A young woman entered. She had no white on her body, as had Dida, nor was there any kerchief on her head or about her breasts. When the drum sounded she had been in her house seeing to her small infant, but hearing the agida speak the words of the Vodu god, she could not hold back longer, for her god came into her and sent her to the shrine.

Now there were two who paced inside the enclosure, calling their answers to the drumbeats, until once more the steady tapping of the stick on the wood took the place of the strokes on the drumhead, and the second woman sang:

"*Maumbe-wa,*
Maumbe-o,
Father Manga
Father Maumbe.
God Maumbe-wo
God Malimbe, Dagowe.
Tutu calls, ye-o

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Surinam

Tutu calls, yo-o.
God is there in the river alone,
God Tutu calls,
Yo-o, yo."

So the young woman sang as she paced, her body twitching and quivering, while Dida repeated her exclamations. The man again took up his invocation to the gods, then resumed the soft tapping against the wood.

He said to us as he tapped, "My own god is Agida Wenowa. She is a Vodu god, and when I dance I put a parrot feather in my hair. When I play the agida, then all Vodu gods come. The agida is the drum for the Vodu gods."

As he spoke to the slow beating, yet two more figures came crowding in. We had been so intent on the two possessed women and on what the drummer was telling that, not until these new arrivals were at our side, did we notice them. One of them was Affi, the other Amasina. They were as we had left them, Amasina still in her white tunic and kerchiefs, her face and upper body yet more thickly coated with white so that only the eyes were alive, Affi still a grayish color, still anguished.

"We heard the voice of the god. We came."

But there was no longer room in the small shrine for the women to dance. The beating of the stick became fainter and fainter; the drummer no longer touched the skin which topped the drum. Fainter and fainter still came the beat, until the young woman who stood there without white on her body shook herself, as though she were coming awake. For a moment, all was quiet.

"He is gone."

"The god is gone."

"He has released her."

The drummer put back his stick. Slowly he lifted the drum; gently he stood the agida upright in its corner.

7

In the Granman's council house, voices of people standing outside reached us. From one to another the news was told.

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"You have come to go, come to go far, come to go far to bring the wood to the water. But it is long, it is far, to the river. Thank you, friends."

Then the song was taken up by the workers and, with each rhythmic measure, the great piece of lumber went farther through the jungle on its way to the river. When he had chanted for us the greeting to the men, Bayo began to sing a song relating to men's casual exploits with women and, as he finished the song, he laughed. "White man, if you came with us, you would hear what songs the men make up about women!"

3

The phonograph had delighted Bayo from the first. When Apanto had summoned the spirit of his obia to fight the machine, Bayo had watched. When the white man's glue had repaired the broken belt, and the hot sun had made the machine "walk" once more, Bayo had approved.

"The machine is not weak," he had said. "I will sing for it."

And sing for it he did.

But the curse of Apanto still troubled the machine, for up the river and down there had been difficulty with it. Often when there was a particularly good song to be recorded, the belt would give, the machine would fail the white man. The story of the prowess of Apanto had gone up the river with the Gankwe paddlers, and when the machine stopped, heads nodded, and we would catch the word "obia" among the murmurs of the bystanders.

Bayo thought, it seemed, that the machine's proud spirit was by this time properly chastened and, since twice the machine had refused to work while he was singing into it, twice had made him stop the song and its drum accompaniment, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"White man," said Bayo, shortly after our return from up the river, "I will help the spirit of the machine. I will

11 Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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Chapter XVII

SARAMACCA OBIA

I

NO WORD of African origin which has survived in the New World has taken on such grim meaning as has the word *obia* in many of the islands of the Caribbean. No Negro there will speak of it, and its practices and properties are secret. When obia strikes in the islands, it is usually a matter for the government, and the forms its vengeance knows too often take a grisly turn.

In the life of the Bush Negro, however, obia is everywhere, and its name the commonest of bywords, for among the Suriname Negroes obia is not black magic, or witchcraft, or sorcery. Black magic [in the Suriname bush is *wisi*, and wisi is never confounded in the Bush Negro's mind with obia.

"Obia is good. Obia heals," they say in Suriname.

"Obia warns, obia protects."

"Obia protects a man against the force of a bullet, the thrust of an iron weapon, the dangers of fire."

"You want to know what obia is, Massa?" our cook asked one day. "We have this *komfo singi*—this priest's song:

> *"I am no master,*
> *And I am no slave,*
> *Yet when the masters come,*
> *They carry water for me."*

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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789 718 439 before the new moon comes, and when you do this, you must say,

[539] *"Obia-o,*
Your spirit must stay,
Your power must not leave this.
Do not go elsewhere,
Do not become defiled."

789 718 There was the obia on which Bayo had lavished all the magic he could command so that his friends might be safe in the bush. From the sacred grass known as *s'a*—the same grass from which the woven ceremonial dancing skirts are made here on the river—he made several long lengths of twine. These he wove into a square which later became the pendant of this neck obia. On this, as a base, he sewed two cowries facing each other, and in the middle of the fringed border of this pendant he fastened a bit of a macaw's feather, blue and orange in color.

The twisted cord about the neck had several knots in it where the cord met the pendant. Tying is the symbol of attaching, of binding, so that if an invocation was uttered in the making of these knots, and the twine was then drawn taut, the power was certain to be lodged inside the knots. Then, too, knots form links, and links, whether they be in a metal chain or in fiber or wood, symbolize union, and any object or ornament with links is, therefore, much [715] valued in bush and in town. A linked chain is a favorite gift to please the akra, the soul, among the coastal Negroes. [832] A woman who wishes to attach her man to her will rise at night noiselessly and will knot a hair from the man's head three times, speaking her invocation. In the bush few obias are found which do not have several knots in them.

In his exuberance Bayo placed so many prohibitions on this finely woven obia, that we asked him if he could not nullify some of them.

784 787 "For very strong obias, we have many tchina. It is best so, because no one who wants to harm you will guess all of them and so succeed in robbing the obia of its power.

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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his rattle danced his dance, the moon sank behind the screen of branches.

It was late. Slowly the last dancer came out of his orgy of possession. One by one the drums stopped until, for a moment, all was quiet. Then, taking the apinti drum up the path beyond our clearing, one of the drummers drummed an invocation to the spirits that had come.

We trained our flashlights on the path which led to the river, lighting the way of the dancers to their waiting boats, while they sang for us the seketi song we had heard the night of Zimbi's funeral.

Thank you, thank you, white man,
For coming to the Saramacca River,
For bringing us your diamond fire,
To light the darkness of our path.

5

At the village opposite our base camp, a girl had died shortly before our return from up river. The eighth night after the death was to be commemorated with the usual dancing of "eighth-day night," and with the ceremony of throwing away food for the spirit of the dead.

"Come tonight and we will dance for you," the men of the village said. It was agreed that they should come for us when they were through with the ceremony for throwing away the food, for the bereaved family would not look kindly upon the intrusion of the whites at the ceremony.

As we waited for the messenger, Bayo prowled about uneasily. He had been nervous for the past few days. His spirits had been troubling him, and he said he needed to dance. It was some time since he had danced, and his spirits were vexed with him for this neglect.

"If they dance Kromanti, I will dance, too," he said.

We talked with him of the rum we would have to take. The strength in which it was distilled made it necessary to cut it with water. Bayo watched us as we took out one bottle, prepared the rum, and then took up another. His hand interposed.

"OBIA COMES!"

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Opete kwasi Adjaini-o
Opete kwasi Adjaini-obia-o
Opete kwasi
Tide Adjaini-a weti kwao, kwao, kwao, kwao.

The chorus repeated,

Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-yi
Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-yo
Opete kwaso, Adjaini-o-kumani!

They were becoming more and more agitated. The rattles sounded a faster tempo, the drums beat louder, and the music swung into another song.

Amanu Djadja-o
O-o-o-o-o-o
Amanu Djadja-o
O ye-e-e
Kuma, luku, mowa,
O-e Mama-e
O-o-o-o-o - o - o . . .

This was a song of greeting for the Djadja spirit. Bayo 764
still urged the rhythms out of the improvised apinti which 533
he was playing. The drummers were calling all the Kromanti spirits, the buzzard called Opete, the jaguar, Tigri, and Djadja, the "devil." Would they come?

The question was answered soon enough. Out of the 787
forest into the clearing ran one whose obia had come to him. It was Opete obia and, in his strength of possession, he had torn off two branches from a palm tree in the bush. These he held under his arms, so that, as he pranced about in his dance, he impersonated the awkwardness of the great carrion bird which gave its name to his obia. The tufts of palm leaves projecting from behind his flexed arms were wings. He leaped as in flight, then with startling rapidity he began turning round and round to the flapping of his wings.

Apanto suddenly seized a stick we held and, whirling it 787
about our heads, was off to his dance, joining the six or 796

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

796 centre clearing, no longer caring, no longer entirely con-
535 scious, their bodies driven by the rhythm of the drums.
158 No man has yet danced. Now a young buck of nineteen jumps into the centre and begins the *awasa* dance. His movements simulate the flying of a hawk, arms out like wings, pirouetting gracefully. His bare feet stamp the earth, hard enough, it seems, to break his bones. Another man joins him, waving his arms at full length, like an eagle in flight. They chant in talkee-talkee an *awasa* song:

"Fooru mo luku bon nanga ahga."

●[539] It means: The fowl must be careful of the hawk; in other words, the girls must be careful of the men. They circle from the waist like birds soaring into the blue.

796 Now a man begins dancing toward a woman. She re-
832 treats. No dancer has yet touched another, or even noticed another. But this one is making definite love advances to the woman. He mimics coitus. Coyly she evades his approaches, and will have none of his movements. They are not serious. When she definitely refuses his copulatory advances, the drums stop. He takes a drum from one of the men, puts it under his arm, and follows her, dancing around the clearing, beating out a message of love. They weave a pattern of movement, in and out, in this dance of courtship to the lone muttering tambour.

[202] There is a halt. The drummers rap out a message to other canoes coming up the river, telling them to hurry. Soon more strangers arrive for the final round.

/23 cont./

551 The boys born on Sunday Kwassie; the girls Kwassiba.
" " " " Monday Kodjo; " " Adjuba.
" " " " Tuesday Kwamina; " " Abenie.
" " " " Wednesday Kwakoe; " " Akoeba.
" " " " Thursday Jauw; " " Jaba.
" " " " Friday Kofi; " " Afie.
" " " " Saturday Kwami; " " Amba.

538 Their odo or proverbs as a rule have reference to their simple bush life, for instance:

• 539 "Te pikien boessi kiebrie joe boen, dan joe no moesoe falla biegie boessi te joe toeka naka hen"; that is,

"If you are protected by a small bush, be content with it and do not demand the bigger one that you may happen to see."

Another meaning is:

"If the little suffices, then do not strive for the greater."

"Na srefie avie die de falla pikien bon, de falla bigie wantoe"; that is,

"The ax that cuts down little trees also cuts down big trees."

Another meaning is:

"God, who does not forsake the worm, will not forsake a man either," or:

/24/ "Nobody is so unhappy but that days of good luck come for him"; also:

"Regard your enemy not too lightly."

Chapter XV

General Knowledge

824 This is on a very low level among them and is confined mainly to a thorough knowledge of varieties of wood and medicinal herbs in use among them.

6: Hurault

SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Boni

● 539

[For translated texts of folktales, plus several riddles and proverbs, see category 116, pp. 423-457.]

/147 cont./

848 If the girl is pregnant, the man may not abandon her: that would make a great to-do between the two kin groups: he must stay with her at least until the birth of the child.

883 836 178 [582] Nowadays among the Boni things tend to happen completely otherwise than custom makes provision for. The general opinion is that girls can no longer be held down, that they escape more and more from the authority of their mothers; many of them begin to run wild at about 14 or 15, and people are obliged to marry them off precipitately at 15 or 16. It is difficult to say what the proportion of these hasty marriages is, but the recriminations heard on all sides on the subject of the shamelessness of girls give the idea that it is increasing. In the [582] villages on the French bank, out of nine girls married in 1958 [848] there were only four marriages concluded according to regulations; the five others had been arranged hastily either because the girl was pregnant (two cases) or because she had laid herself open to scandal. /148/

582 Nearly all girls married between 1952 and 1956 were 15 to 17 years old.

584 This is about how things happen:

A man who is attracted by a girl tries to exchange a few [537] words with her unknown to her mother. There are special forms for these declarations. One speaks in a low voice, very fast, using special formulas. This is how one of our boatmen, one evening in October, 1952, addressed young Lomé, age 15, of Boniville village, who had gotten away from her mother on the pretext of going to get water for us.

584 • 539 "Woman, I love thee, I wish to live with thee, I wish to marry thee. That which God put in me I cannot take away (1).

1. Which means: I cannot change, you must take me as I am.

/148 cont./

584 539 I do not know whether thou lovest me, whether thou wilt answer yes or no; perhaps I am not so handsome as thou, but I cannot help loving thee. If thou lovest me, tell me clearly. I have come, I have attached my boat to a rock, I have wet my feet before reaching land (2)."

2. High-flown words to which no precise meaning can be attached; it is a kind of verbal music whose formulas vary infinitely.

"Come back tomorrow, come back, I cannot answer thee today, I cannot."

"I know for today, but not for tomorrow (3); yield to me,

3. One must understand: It is necessary to decide today.

be mine, I shall give thee the garment (4)."

4. The man lays down one of his garments at the home of the woman who has agreed to marry him.

584 Our departure on our tour the next day put an end to his attempts for the time being!

836 584 It often happens that the girl allows herself to be seduced; her mother soon learns of it from the village people. She flies into a passion, beats her daughter to obtain a confession without [558] which she can obtain nothing from the supposed seducer. It is an extreme shame for a mother not to receive the price of her

/211 cont./

153 special drum is used, about two meters long and very narrow,
791 devoid of any decoration, which is called lãŋga dɔ̃ or papa
787 dɔ̃.
534

To call on her gita, the possessed woman (they are almost
787 always women) stands, puts on a piece of cloth which she always
[562] keeps nearby and always takes along with her when she travels:
this is the garment of the god; it consists of a sort of scarf
crossed in front; then she throws white clay, pemba, on her feet
from right to left and left to right while invoking the god.
Possession is almost immediate. One sees the woman's eyes
roll up and her expression become haggard. The god does not
cover himself entirely with pemba like the Kumẽnti, he makes
himself a sort of headband on the forehead with white clay.
787 He begins with an invocation to Masa Gadu said in ordinary
788 language.
639
[782] "Masa gadu, gi mi pimisi, beka mi na pikin nẽŋge; ala
sani di mi ɔ taki, na yu mu gi mi kaakiti, beka na yu abi mi
kaakiti, da mi yãfalu gi yu."

"Masa Gadu, I implore you, for I am a humble creature;
(in) all that I am going to say, it is you who will give me
strength, for my strength is in you; I shall exalt you."

787 Next come formulas of welcome to those present, which
788 are the exact translation of the formulas of greeting of everyday
[198] life, then songs, all in the Papa language. After about a quarter
of an hour, it enters a hut and sits down, answering in ordinary
language the questions of those present, always in a singing
tone.

787 Possession by Papa gadu does not have the bestial character
of possession by Kumẽnti; outside of the dances, it does not
involve brutish gestures or bizarre acts; the possessed woman
hums softly in a shrill voice, moving with graceful gestures.
[531] /212/ Sometimes she draws strange signs on the huts; the Boni
state that that is a kind of writing, that other possessed people

/258 cont./

776 One of the best known of these gods is that of the Maruini.
823 It is assumed to control all the tributaries of the Maruini as far
778 as their sources. Its place of worship is a thicket situated downstream from the dangerous Kubi Sula Falls, at the mouth
782 of the river. Before starting to go upriver in August, 1956,
[539] the crews of our three boats, in an atmosphere of great meditation, lined up behind the eldest of them, who made the offering of water and tafia, uttering these words: "God who commands this river, watch over us, keep us from being sick, let no accident happen to us; if there is on this river an interdiction which we do not know (2) and which, through

2. It is obvious here that this is a case of de facto worship of a divinity about which nothing is known.

ignorance, we do not observe, pardon us. Bring us back to our villages safe and sound." The boatmen came one after the other to make the offering of tafia. The scene lasted more than a quarter of an hour. This ceremony was not without nobility, engendering belief in that sincere fervor of animists so often mentioned in the /259/ ethnographic literature.
771 But our return at the end of our work trip took place in a completely different atmosphere, showing the strictly practical and utilitarian side of the religion of the refugee Blacks. Once past the Kubi Sula, the three boss boatmen could not persuade any of their men, who were in the act of eating their meal, to accompany them as far as the place of worship to thank the god. Some told us straight out that they were scoffing at this god from now on, having no intention of
[782] coming back on the Maruini. As for the boss boatmen themselves, they measured stingily the quantity of tafia offered

/264 cont./

796 At seven o'clock, about ten men assemble at the fraga
769 tiki. They pour water first, then tafia, while uttering the
539 prayer whose whole text follows, taken from a tape recording:
[126] Fintiman (pouring the water):

"Ancestors, hail! We have come to you; it is for the new year that we have come to you! as you yourselves used to do when you were (alive). May God protect us until the new year comes back again; thus it is that you yourselves used to pour the water on behalf of the ancestors. We have come to our place of prayer to speak with you, to ask you to carry our words to God."

(The same formulas are repeated several times.)

Lébiman:

"This is the New Year's Day water. It is God's day. He has arrived. Grand man Awensay (1), (because) I have not known the more distant ancestors, it is you alone that I call; call all the others."

1. Predecessor of Grand Man Difu, who died in 1936. In each village the last dead head is invoked by name in order to ask him to call the more ancient dead.

"It has arrived, God's day. As for the grand man himself, a slight hindrance has come to him, he could not come, but it is not that he is no longer interested in the village."

"Watch over all the people who are there... we have come to pour water on your behalf, so that you will watch over the chickens and dogs of the village (and up to the living men) (2). Protect the grand man; if misfortune was about to

2. Usual prayer formula.

/264 cont./

796 happen to him, may it pass to one side. Thus we have come
769 to pour (the water) to beg you to protect the village. The year
• 539 has changed today, it is a new year. May we have money and
food, we beg of you, ancestors; watch over our plantings, may
they prosper, may the young women who fish at the wharf
catch fish."

"All the captains pour (the water), the fiskal, the majors pour (3) for all the lineages; protect the villages."

[184]
[629]

3. Honorific titles imitated from the Djuka but which, among the Boni, do not really mean anything; the head of Kormotibo village bears the title fiskal and the one of Kotika village the title major.

Fintiman:

"The people who have pure hearts, protect them, big and small. But the people whose hearts are not good, who do evil spells to kill others and decrease the village, we do not pray for them; turn them out."

"Watch over the grand man; if something happens to him, it must not be said that we, the people who are seated there, have not prayed well. Great ancestors, we supplicate you, if we were on the point of meeting misfortune, that we may find the good."

(They begin to pour the tafia.

[illegible] Grand Man Awemay ...." (Thanks follow for a trip which was carried out without hindrance.)

Lebiman:

"May the grand man live long with us, may misfortune not happen to him."

/285 cont./

"Great ancestors who are in God's country, it is you who have the strength of the village."

(The tafia gushes forth.)

"Drink, drink, but do not get drunk to the point of being deluded, look with favor upon the righteous, scatter the wicked."

Next, Fintiman goes off to make an offering of tafia accompanied by a few words at the chapel of Odun. Then he goes to the edge of the mortuary shed to pour water, tafia, and coffee on behalf of Samalobi, the grand man's brother, for whom mourning has not been lifted.

He goes next to the house of the deceased grand man Awemay to make an offering of coffee (Awemay, like the other grand men, used to drink coffee).

The prayer of the preceding year (January 1, 1957), presided over by grandfather Samaalbi, had had a higher inspiration. After praying in about the same terms as above for the Boni, they prayed for the Djuka, explaining that in days gone by Boni and Djuka had fought, but that all that was forgotten. They prayed next for the Saramaka, then for the Indians, finally for the Europeans. I asked why; they answered: "It is because the Europeans were the ones who brought us to this country which has become ours." /p. 286 is blank/

/287/

CHAPTER VIII

TALES -- PROVERBS

Tales (Anãsi tɔli) and Proverbs (ɔdo) retain an important social function among the Refugee Blacks. It is always by tales that the great customary ceremonies of the lifting of mourning begin. Their function is to concentrate the attention of the